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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report describes trends in and significant issues associated with electoral assistance provided to Member States by the United Nations system since the last report of the Secretary-General (A/68/301), dated 9 August 2013. A little over 65 Member States received electoral assistance during this period.

The report notes continuing efforts to strengthen coherence and coordination within the United Nations system, under the auspices of the focal point for electoral assistance. It also describes cooperation with non-United Nations organizations and initiatives.

With respect to gender equality in elections, the report notes a continuing upward trend in the number of women in parliament worldwide, but also points out that this improvement is not sufficient and that progress is uneven. It also describes the activities of the United Nations system in promoting the political participation of women, in supporting efforts of Member States to meet their international obligations and commitments, and in mainstreaming gender in United Nations assistance activities. The report calls on all Member States to redouble their efforts to promote women's participation in politics, noting that this goes beyond mere numbers within an elected body and includes the empowerment of women as full and active participants in voting and decision-making.

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The report discusses some common challenges with regard to the credibility of elections faced by Member States and the United Nations entities that assist them. These include electoral malfeasance committed for political ends, and instances in which contestants refused to accept outcomes that were generally considered to be legitimate. Credibility is related to the extent to which both international obligations are respected and the election process is professional, accurate, impartial and transparent in all stages of its administration. At the same time, the connection between the technical quality of an election and the legitimacy of its outcomes is complex.

This report underlines that a genuine election is one in which the result reflects the freely expressed choice or choices of electors and is therefore broadly accepted. As regards increasing the likelihood that outcomes are accepted, the report points to the need to both mitigate winner-takes-all and high-stakes politics in an election and strengthen the procedural elements of the election itself. A comprehensive strategy for promoting the acceptance of results and preventing violence centred around elections involves both broad engagement by the Organization and the exercise of political will by national actors.

The report offers reflections on the ideal timing of elections in a post-conflict context; notes that it is difficult to construct a general template for determining when the circumstances are right for holding a first election; and stresses that, as democratic development is an ongoing process, it may take decades before all the conditions are comparable with those present in more mature democracies. Moreover, a discussion on timing should address the question how the legitimacy needed to govern could be established other than through an election.

The report draws attention to the fact that the level of international financial support for electoral assistance has not kept pace with the number of assistance projects, noting that some projects face significant budget gaps. It calls for more cost-effective solutions in respect of electoral assistance and greater discernment regarding the kind of assistance to be provided in each case. The report also notes that Member States are primarily responsible for organizing cost-effective elections and for pursuing strategies that will eventually allow them to be self-reliant.

Noting a continued growth in the number of organizations outside the United Nations that offer electoral assistance, the report highlights the risk of possible overcrowding in the field of international support. It encourages Member States, when requesting assistance or drafting mandates, to consider including a lead role for the United Nations in ensuring coherence and coordination among all assistance providers.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 68/164 of 18 December 2013, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of that resolution and the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs to regularly inform Member States about requests for electoral assistance and the nature of any assistance provided. The report describes United Nations activities in the field of electoral assistance carried out since the previous report on this subject (A/68/301).

2. United Nations electoral assistance is provided only at the specific request of the Member State concerned, or based on a mandate from the Security Council or General Assembly. Before assistance is agreed and provided, the United Nations assesses the needs of the Member State to ensure that the assistance is tailored to the specific needs of the country or situation. As the Assembly has reaffirmed on many occasions, United Nations assistance should be carried out in an objective, impartial, neutral and independent manner, with due respect for sovereignty, while recognizing that the responsibility for organizing elections lies with Member States.

3. During the reporting period, the number of Member States requesting and receiving United Nations electoral assistance remained high. United Nations support has generally continued, as in previous reporting periods, to take the form of technical assistance. In addition to reporting on key activities and developments, this report reflects on some of the patterns in electoral assistance and highlights some of the challenges presented in situations in which the credibility of an election is called into question.

II. United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

A. Mandates

4. The question of enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections has been in the agenda of the General Assembly since its forty-fourth session. The Assembly considered this question, including the issue of United Nations electoral assistance, on an annual basis until its fiftieth session and has been continuing its consideration of the question on a biennial basis since then.

5. The institutional arrangements for United Nations electoral assistance and the entities involved have grown and evolved since 1991, the year in which the Secretary-General designated the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs as focal point for electoral assistance matters, with the endorsement of the General Assembly. Today, a range of United Nations entities have mandates that refer to electoral events and support or otherwise engage in electoral support activities. In this field of diverse actors, the Assembly has repeatedly stressed the need for comprehensive coordination, under the auspices of the focal point.

6. The General Assembly, in its resolution 68/164, reaffirmed the clear leadership role of the focal point within the United Nations system, including in ensuring system-wide coherence and consistency, in strengthening United Nations institutional memory and in the development, dissemination and issuance of

electoral assistance policies. The focal point decides on the parameters for United Nations electoral assistance in a particular country and is also entrusted with maintaining the roster of electoral experts who can be quickly deployed for any United Nations assistance activity.

7. The focal point is supported by the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. It recommends to the focal point the parameters for all United Nations electoral assistance, pursuant to the request of Member States, following an electoral needs assessment. The Division also advises on the design of electoral mission components or assistance projects and maintains the institutional memory of the Organization and the single roster of experts. It is also responsible for policy development. It provides, on behalf of the focal point, ongoing political and technical guidance to all United Nations entities involved in electoral assistance, including on electoral policies and good practices.

8. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the major implementing body of the Organization for support to developing electoral institutions, legal frameworks and processes and support to elections outside the peacekeeping or post-conflict context. In its resolution 68/164, the General Assembly requested UNDP to continue its democratic governance assistance programmes in cooperation with other relevant organizations, in particular those that promote the strengthening of democratic institutions and linkages between civil society and Governments.

9. In peacekeeping or post-conflict environments, electoral assistance is generally provided through components of field missions under the aegis of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations Secretariat or the Department of Political Affairs. Military and police components of peacekeeping missions support national law enforcement agencies in providing security for electoral processes. UNDP also frequently provides support to such field missions when they undertake to carry out their electoral assistance mandates y. In countries with peacekeeping, peacebuilding or special political missions, electoral assistance is delivered in a fully integrated manner, irrespective of whether the mission is structurally integrated.

10. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continues to provide training and advice on human rights monitoring in the context of elections, supports and organizes campaigns for violence-free elections, engages in advocacy for electoral laws and institutions that are compliant with human rights, and monitors and reports on human rights violations during electoral processes.

11. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) is mandated to provide, through its normative support functions and operational activities, guidance and technical support to all Member States, at their request, on gender equality, the empowerment and rights of women and gender mainstreaming. It promotes gender equality and women's participation in political processes. UN-Women is also mandated to lead, coordinate and promote the accountability of the United Nations system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It provides training and advice on promoting gender equality and women's participation in electoral processes.

12. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the specialized agency tasked with promoting and supporting freedom of expression, press freedom and freedom of information. Free, independent media, online as well as offline, are essential to the transition towards democracy. To this end, the aim of UNESCO regarding elections is to strengthen the capacity of the media to provide fair and balanced coverage of electoral activities.

13. Other entities of the United Nations system involved in activities related to elections include the Department of Field Support of the United Nations Secretariat, which is primarily responsible for providing administrative and logistical support services to United Nations peacekeeping operations, special political missions and other field presences; the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which provides support to electoral activities, largely in post-conflict/peacekeeping environments, in partnership with other United Nations entities; the United Nations Volunteers programme, which provides electoral staff to work in electoral projects and electoral components of peace operations; the Peacebuilding Fund, which can, exceptionally, support elections at critical junctures for peacebuilding; and the United Nations Democracy Fund, which supports projects that strengthen the voice of civil society, promote human rights and encourage the participation of all groups in democratic processes.

B. Electoral assistance activities

14. Annex I to this report provides short descriptions of electoral processes and assistance activities as carried out in a few selected Member States. Annex II contains a list of the States that have received electoral assistance during the period under review, at their specific request or through a Security Council mandate. In providing such assistance, the United Nations, as in previous periods, has continued to emphasize, where appropriate, the use of measures to strengthen confidence in electoral processes and help bring about peaceful outcomes. This has included advocacy and technical assistance in the design of inclusive electoral systems and rules of the process through broad political consultation; the appointment of electoral authorities that are, and are perceived as being, honest, impartial and capable; achieving transparency in electoral administration; and the removal of all barriers to the participation of women and underrepresented groups as voters, candidates and electoral officials. The United Nations has continued to explore how to conduct its electoral assistance activities in such a way as to ensure their complementarity to other United Nations system activities in support of peaceful transitions, democratic governance, the rule of law, human rights and gender equality. It has also continued to pursue opportunities to help build a conductive environment, where appropriate and where requested, through, inter alia, good offices, support to political dialogue, facilitation and mediation, often in collaboration with regional and subregional entities or other actors.

C. Cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system

15. In its resolution 46/137 of 17 December 1991, the General Assembly endorsed the Secretary-General's intention to designate a focal point in order to, among other goals, ensure consistency in the handling of requests of Member States organizing elections. At that time, the Assembly also requested United Nations entities to

collaborate closely with the designated focal point and inform him or her of the assistance provided and activities undertaken by them. Since then, the Assembly has reiterated the need for comprehensive coordination and coherence among United Nations entities in each of its resolutions on this item, most recently resolution 68/164. I am pleased to report that further progress has been made in several areas during the period under review in meeting the requests of the Assembly for coordination, as described directly below:

(a) United Nations entities have met regularly in the context of the Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism for United Nations Electoral Assistance, chaired by the Electoral Assistance Division, to exchange information, help ensure coordination and discuss new electoral policies;

(b) System-wide electoral policies issued by the focal point, in close consultation with United Nations entities, have continued to grow in number and now include policies on United Nations support towards creating and reforming electoral management bodies, and designing electoral systems;

(c) The framework and modalities for the single United Nations electoral roster of experts were developed to enable that roster to be used by all parts of the United Nations system involved in providing electoral assistance. The United Nations Secretariat and agencies, funds and programmes will all be able to draw from the roster as comprising a pool of pre-cleared candidates. At the time of its completion, the first assessment of experts for inclusion on the roster encompassed over 2,000 candidates. Owing to the high number of applicants, extrabudgetary resources and a temporary reallocation of staff responsibilities were required to facilitate management of the process and the conduct of screening, assessment and interviews. So that the diversity reflected by the roster can be further increased, future targeted efforts will require similar resources.

D. Cooperation with other organizations

16. As in previous reporting periods, the United Nations has actively utilized platforms and tools for electoral capacity-building, institutional memory and knowledge-sharing at the global level. The most notable initiatives are the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) project and the Global Electoral Organization (GEO) conference. The United Nations has supported efforts to update and maintain the relevance of these global initiatives. A global evaluation of the BRIDGE project conducted in 2014 affirmed its continued relevance as a key capacity development tool in electoral assistance. Recommended improvements are being implemented and new training modules updated. Together with the National Election Commission of the Republic of Korea, UNDP hosted the sixth GEO conference in Seoul in October 2013. The conference, whose overarching theme was sustainable electoral processes and strengthened democracy, brought together over 300 election and democracy professionals to share experiences and identify trends.

17. Electoral partnerships with, and support to, regional and subregional organizations remained a focus area during the period under review. The United Nations has continued to support the Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit of the African Union in organizing and conducting workshops and training sessions for election observers across the continent and in developing various election-related

materials, including election observation manuals and methodologies. Most recently, the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs deployed a senior electoral expert to the United Nations Office to the African Union to support the efforts of the United Nations and African Union. Similarly, the Electoral Assistance Division collaborated with the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in the training of electoral staff and observers, and in establishing an electoral database and an institutional memory in each organization. For example, the United Nations organized a workshop and a round-table discussion on various aspects of electoral processes at the headquarters of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in February 2014. The event provided participants from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and several other regional organizations, including the Organization of American States, the League of Arab States and the African Union, with a venue for sharing their experiences and good practices. In July 2015, the United Nations organized another event in Jeddah, on the role of civil society and domestic observer groups in enhancing the integrity of electoral processes, which was attended by civil society organizations from States members and non-States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and representatives of regional organizations and international non-governmental organizations. This was in line with Assembly resolution 68/164, in which the Assembly reiterated the role of civil society in the promotion of democratization. The United Nations held discussions with the secretariat of the Southern African Development Community with a view to identifying new areas of electoral cooperation in line with the existing partnership. Initial steps were also taken towards developing an electoral partnership between the United Nations and the secretariat of the Caribbean Community and Common Market.

18. UNDP continued to implement a large number of its support activities through a formal partnership with the European Union. In addition to engaging in country-specific projects, the partnership organized a global workshop on the role of electoral stakeholders and electoral administrations in reinforcing the credibility of electoral processes, which was hosted by the Independent Election Commission of Jordan. UNDP also facilitated and supported the development of the Organization of Arab Electoral Management Bodies, which was launched in June 2015 to provide a platform for regional collaboration towards enhancing electoral knowledge and capacities, and furthering the democratic agenda in the region. This is the first such regional electoral network among Arab States.

19. The United Nations Secretariat is preparing to host, in October 2015, the observance of the anniversary of the endorsement of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, launched at the United Nations in 2005. The fact that the Declaration is now endorsed by 50 organizations from various parts of the world indicates its recognition globally as a document fundamental to the professional observation of electoral processes. In a parallel development, the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, launched by the United Nations Secretariat in 2012, has enjoyed growing acceptance as a normative document among non-partisan election monitoring organizations. As of June 2015, some 264 non-partisan citizen election observation and monitoring organizations from 90 countries had endorsed the Declaration, up from 198 organizations from 80 countries since the last report. There are also 16 "international supporters" of the Declaration.

III. Gender equality and elections

20. Promoting women's political participation and supporting national efforts in this respect, including in the area of elections, remains one of the Organization's highest priorities. Data maintained by the International Parliamentary Union indicates that, as of June 2015, 22.4 per cent of parliamentarians in single and lower houses of parliament worldwide were women. This represents a small increase in the proportion reported two years before, when the figure stood at 21.3 per cent (see A/68/301, para. 20), but this still falls short of global aspirations.

21. Within their respective mandates, UN-Women and other United Nations entities have engaged in advocacy and assisted Member States in efforts to meet their international obligations and commitments, including those derived from (a) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women[1] and related general recommendation No. 25 (2004) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, on temporary special measures;[2] (b) the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;[3] (c) General Assembly resolution 66/130 on women and political participation; and (d) Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

22. Systematic efforts have also been made to ensure that electoral assistance activities are gender-sensitive and include key components on promoting women's political participation. In support of national efforts, United Nations entities have provided: support for women's groups, women candidates and elected members of parliament through assistance in training and capacity-building; assistance in sensitization and training on gender issues targeting political parties, youth, civil society organizations and media; assistance to stakeholders in increasing women's participation in electoral management bodies at all levels; and technical advice to Member States, upon their request, on issues related to drafting or revising electoral laws, including on temporary special measures, where appropriate.

23. In collaboration with other United Nations entities, the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs has ensured that gender is mainstreamed in all United Nations electoral policy documents. A policy directive on promoting women's electoral and political participation through United Nations electoral assistance was developed and disseminated by the focal point in 2013. Progress was made in achieving more effective mainstreaming of gender in needs assessments. Of the 26 assessments conducted in 2014, 25 included gender-specific analysis and recommendations. In addition, in over 80 per cent of the cases where temporary special measures were not already in place, those assessments made specific recommendations on their use. In a survey conducted by the Electoral Assistance Division among United Nations electoral officials in the field, 92 per cent of the respondents stated that in providing advice to their national counterparts, they applied policies including a gender perspective. In an internal assessment of all its electoral assistance projects in 2014, UNDP found that 62 per cent had gender mainstreaming or women's empowerment as one of the main objectives.

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[1] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

[2] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/59/38), part one, annex I.

[3] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes 1 and 2.

IV. United Nations resources for electoral assistance

24. The regular budget of the Department of Political Affairs covers the costs for the core staff of the Electoral Assistance Division. Extrabudgetary funds have played a vital role in enabling the Division to carry out its various substantive activities. At present, the Division is not able to draw on the support account for peacekeeping operations, even where it provides support to the electoral components of such missions. UNDP electoral assistance projects are generally funded through voluntary contributions by Member States, and often managed through multi-partner basket funds, which include national counterparts in the management structure so as to ensure greater national ownership. In integrated peacekeeping and special political or peacebuilding missions with an electoral component, the mission budget covers some of the electoral work (including of the relevant mission staff), while the balance, which is often quite substantial, is funded through UNDP multi-donor funding mechanisms.

25. The trust funds administered by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, along with the UNDP Global Programme for Electoral Cycle Support, remain important sources of extra-budgetary funding for electoral assistance activities. Such funds allow the implementation of rapid response and catalytic projects and programmes, including those aimed at preventing conflict and supporting the participation of women and underrepresented groups in political processes. During the reporting period, extrabudgetary funds were used to support the development of the single roster, rapidly establish activities and deploy experts to, among other countries, the Central African Republic, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Togo, and to support the partnership with the African Union. Extrabudgetary funds administered by UN-Women were used in support of programming to promote women's political and electoral participation.

V. Observations

26. The seventieth anniversary of the Organization provides an opportunity in the area of electoral assistance, as in other areas of work of the United Nations, to look back at what has been achieved and consider future developments. There continues to be a strong demand for United Nations electoral assistance among Member States. I strongly believe that the Organization's neutrality is a key factor in this regard. The Organization has also shown an ability to adapt to the evolving needs of Member States. We must preserve these features of our work. To help us do so, it is critical that we remind ourselves from time to time of the nature of elections and the overall objectives of electoral assistance. This is particularly important in dealing with contested elections, which we sometimes witness in transitional settings and in countries with a history marked by unrest and conflict.

27. A common challenge in such contexts is dealing with electoral malfeasance which is committed for political ends. Fraud is a perversion of democracy and a violation of people's rights. As fraud constitutes a political strategy, it is candidates and political leaders who should therefore take the lead in preventing and discouraging and it. However, an election in which fraud has occurred is not the same as a fraudulent election. The nature and scale of the fraud committed can vary, and it may have been committed by more than one candidate or party. With this kept in mind, United Nations assistance often includes vigorous efforts to help prevent,

detect and mitigate fraud. In so doing, the Organization aims to balance the need for inclusion and enfranchisement with the need for protection of the integrity of the process. Indeed, overly strict anti-fraud measures may lead to situations in which voters are unable to exercise their right to vote.

28. More broadly, any situation in which there is a perception that the electoral process lacks credibility because of irregularities is a serious one. All too frequently, Member States — and the United Nations entities that provide them with assistance — grapple with situations in which contestants and their supporters refuse to engage in the electoral process or allege widespread misconduct and procedural flaws. I am particularly concerned about elections in which contestants refuse to accept outcomes that are generally considered to be legitimate. Both types of situations — those where there is real electoral fraud and those where fraud is merely alleged — can undermine electoral processes in a very fundamental way, as they erode confidence in the existing political system. This can lead to polarization, unrest, a breakdown of political dialogue and, possibly, the outbreak of violence.

29. The credibility of an election is closely related to the extent to which (a) the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality and other international obligations are respected and (b) the election is professional, accurate, impartial and transparent in all stages of its administration. At the same time, the connection between the technical quality of an election and the legitimacy of its outcomes is complex. Most elections produce results that are accepted even in the face of imperfections. In contrast, procedurally well-conducted elections can lead to situations in which a losing candidate or other stakeholders refuse to accept the outcome or lose confidence in the results.

30. The reason for this is that elections are inextricably intertwined with the political context in which they are held. A genuine election is one in which the result reflects the freely expressed choice or choices of electors and is therefore broadly accepted. Consequently, in considering ways in which the Organization might help Member States increase the likelihood that election outcomes will be accepted, I believe that it is critical to mitigate winner-takes-all and extremely high-stakes politics in an election, in addition to strengthening the procedural aspects of the election itself. This entails, inter alia, examining the features of constitutional design; strengthening the system of checks and balances in government; building the capacity of rule of law institutions; ensuring an appropriate distribution of political and economic power among state institutions at different levels of government; promoting inclusive and appropriate electoral and political systems; holding broad discussions on the rules of the electoral process; introducing mechanisms for the protection of human rights of groups and individuals, and the role of the opposition in the political system; bringing potential spoilers, such as armed groups, into the political process; and putting in place mechanisms directed against impunity and pervasive corruption. A comprehensive strategy for promoting the acceptance of results and the prevention of violence centred around elections involves both broad engagement by the Organization, and the exercise of political will by national actors.

31. The responsibility for a successful election lies not just with the electoral management body but with the entire range of electoral stakeholders, which includes political parties, supporters and civil society and voters at large. Nevertheless, the overriding responsibility for a successful election lies with

political leaders, as they are in a position to encourage their supporters to engage in proper, peaceful behaviour; to commit to challenging election results through legal means only and with substantiating evidence; to accept final outcomes, as officially declared; and to be gracious in defeat and magnanimous in victory, including through offering political space for the opposition. I call on all candidates and senior officials of political parties to demonstrate such responsible leadership. I also echo the invitation of the General Assembly to Member States to facilitate the full participation of civil society in electoral processes, in recognition of the fact that civic engagement is an important element in the promotion of democratization.

32. The notion of integrity in elections — referring to adherence to international obligations and commitments, and to professionalism, impartiality, accuracy and transparency in electoral administration — has developed into an important and useful reference point for election administration. The United Nations continues to encourage and support the efforts of Member States to promote electoral integrity by complying with their international commitments, including, as relevant, those set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,[4] the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[5] and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Much valuable work is being done in scholarly and policy circles to identify the hallmarks of integrity. As noted above, however, I am of the view that conducting genuine elections requires more than improving technicalities and ensuring compliance with international commitments. It is also important that one exercise caution before referring to widespread effective practices as universally applicable norms, even when those practices have proved to be effective in a number of situations. The obligations of Member States are based on the international covenants to which they have acceded, amplified by any commitments they may have made through adherence to instruments of a political nature in the context, for example, of regional organizations. As the General Assembly has noted on numerous occasions, there is no single model of democracy.

33. In the context of United Nations assistance to countries emerging from conflict or undergoing a profound political transition, it is sometimes asked whether an election was not held prematurely. In such discussions, the capacity of a country and its institutions are often invoked as providing reasons for concluding that the timing may not have been right. Democratic development, however, is an ongoing process; It may take decades before the level of success of the elections in such a country reaches the level of success of those in more mature democracies; moreover, a good election does not necessarily lead to good governance. Any discussion about timing should take into account the purpose of the election, and how the legitimacy required to govern would be established and maintained other than by an electoral process. I am therefore of the view that it is difficult to create a general template for determining when the circumstances are right for holding a first post-conflict election and simply note in this regard that there should be general agreement on the rules governing the election and the institutions that will administer the process, and adequate funding and sufficient time for all practical preparations. Moreover, it is critical to consider the sequencing of key events in the transition as a whole, rather than just the timing of a first post-conflict election. As holding an election before a new political architecture has taken shape through an inclusive and consultative process could be divisive, an election in such circumstances should therefore be

[4] General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).

[5] See General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

viewed only as a transitional, one-time event, within the context of a putting into place of the longer-term political framework.

34. While I am somewhat encouraged by the continuing upward trend in the number of women in parliament, this has not been sufficient. The presence of women in appointed and elected positions remains low and progress is uneven. More needs to be done globally, both in developing and in developed countries, to improve the situation of women. I call again on all Member States to redouble their efforts to promote women's participation in politics. This, of course, goes beyond mere numbers in an elected body and encompasses the empowerment of women as full and active participants in voting and decision-making.

35. United Nations entities with the mandate to provide electoral assistance should continue to advocate for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, with a view to facilitating their achievement of both de jure and de facto equality with men in terms of enjoying political rights and freedoms. Temporary special measures including quotas have proved to be effective tools for helping to increase women's political participation in situations where the proper conditions are in place. In addition to quotas, there are other temporary special measures, as elaborated in general recommendation No. 25 (2004) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, such as funding mechanisms, which can be effective. Use of a particular measure would depend on the circumstances, as in each case the impact, the complexities and the unintended side effects vary depending on the specific electoral system of the country and the context. Advocacy efforts should extend beyond electoral processes and specific electoral events and focus attention on women's right to political participation at all levels, including in executive and judicial appointments, and on the need to combat discriminatory practices and stereotypes which may limit women's enjoyment of their rights. Access to adequate data is essential when designing effective policies and measures aimed at increasing women's participation in electoral and political processes. The United Nations at all levels should encourage the collection of sex-disaggregated data by national electoral authorities, including on voter registration, candidacy and voter turnout.

36. In my previous reports, I drew attention to the costs of elections and electoral assistance, particularly in the context of the introduction of new technologies. I believe that Member States are primarily responsible for organizing cost-effective elections and for pursuing strategies that will eventually allow them to be self-reliant. This entails adopting methods and practices that are financially sustainable within the context of the country concerned, along with early planning for a realistic transition from international assistance to nationally run and nationally funded elections. I also believe that — now perhaps more than ever before — that the international community must pay close attention to the financial aspects of United Nations assistance. Globally, the level of voluntary contributions for electoral assistance has not kept pace with the increasing number of assistance projects. A number of new projects currently face significant budget gaps. There have also been instances in which donors have announced a reduction in their financial support for long-running projects. Costly elections are also a drain on national budgets, limiting public spending in other priority areas such as health, education and development. While the circumstances in each of these situations are often different, I believe that it has become clear that we all — donors, assistance providers and requesting

Member States — must pursue more cost-effective solutions and become more discerning about the kind of assistance that is to be provided.

37. The number of organizations outside the United Nations system offering electoral assistance and expertise to Member States has continued to grow. In many cases, such new actors have been able to add value and comparative advantages, and work well with, and alongside, United Nations entities. There is a risk, however, that the field of international electoral assistance may become overcrowded. As I noted above, donor funding has not kept up with the increase in activities, making the competition for resources more pronounced. In our experience, the most effective situations are those in which the United Nations has been given a coordinating or convening role with respect to external assistance providers. I again encourage Member States, when requesting assistance, and when drafting mandates and finalizing project documents, to consider including a lead role for the United Nations in ensuring coherence and coordination among all assistance providers.

Annex I

Selected examples of United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

Algeria

Presidential elections were held in Algeria on 17 April 2014. Over 11 million voters (constituting approximately 52 per cent of those eligible to vote) did vote. Despite some security incidents, including a few election-related and ethnic clashes before polling day, the election was conducted in a peaceful atmosphere overall. The Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat deployed a three-member panel of experts during the election to follow the process and to report to the United Nations focal point. The panel met with a wide range of national and international interlocutors and visited a number of polling centres. The panel noted that the elections were technically well organized and that steps had been taken to ensure more consistency in electoral procedures.

Guinea-Bissau

Presidential and legislative elections were held on 13 April 2014, with a second-round presidential run-off held on 18 May 2014. The elections were a key step in efforts to return the country to constitutional order, following the military intervention in May 2012 and the establishment of a transitional Government. Polling was held in a generally peaceful environment and was devoid of any significant incidents. The national security forces were complemented by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) security mission (ECOMIB) to ensure a visible security presence throughout the country. There was a high turnout of voters, estimated at over 60 per cent. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided technical assistance and support in respect of procuring equipment and materials. Working closely with other international partners, in particular the African Union and ECOWAS, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) used his good offices to help create an environment conducive to the conduct of credible elections, in accordance with the mission's mandate, and provided a framework for coordination for other international support.

Libya

Elections to a constitutional drafting assembly were held in Libya on 20 February 2014. They were followed, on 25 June 2014, by elections to the House of Representatives, the country's third national election in the post-Gaddafi era. Political and security challenges in those periods included violence and intimidation directed against prominent female candidates and human rights defenders, including the shooting of one such defender on polling day for the parliamentary election. Observers commended the performance of the High National Electoral Commission. An integrated United Nations electoral team consisting of advisers from the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and UNDP supported the Libyan

authorities in all areas of the electoral operations, external relations and public awareness. The integrated team also facilitated professional development opportunities and dialogue among Libyan electoral stakeholders. The United Nations further engaged with national stakeholders to encourage more women to register as candidates and held capacity-building and training sessions for women candidates. The UNSMIL human rights component monitored the human rights situation during the elections. Following subsequent shifts in the political and security situation, United Nations efforts evolved to focus on strengthening Libya's legislation, processes and institutional capacity so as to ensure operational readiness, should any elections be called. The United Nations Democracy Fund provided support to the strengthening of independent journalism and improvement of citizens' access to information regarding the country's democratic process.

Mali

Mali held presidential elections on 28 July 2013, with a second round on 11 August 2013. The election helped re-establish constitutional order, which had been suspended since the military coup in early 2012. A pre-electoral agreement between the Government and armed opposition groups paved the way for a peaceful process. Despite the constraints imposed by a challenging electoral timetable and a volatile security situation, the election was held under generally calm conditions with no significant security incidents reported. Some 45 per cent of the registered voters participated in the process, a proportion higher than that in previous elections. Legislative elections were held on 24 November 2013 with a second round (where required) on 15 December 2013. Voter turnout was estimated at 37 per cent. Only 8 women were elected, compared with the 15 elected to the previous parliament. An estimated1.2 million citizens were not able to register and the country faced limitations in respect of the participation of refugees despite measures taken by national stakeholders to secure inclusive participation. These challenges notwithstanding, observer groups were generally positive in their assessment of the electoral process.

The United Nations provided political and technical, logistical, financial and security support. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General used his good offices to help establish a conducive environment. The United Nations Integrated Electoral Team, consisting of advisers of UNDP and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), provided technical assistance and advice in a broad range of areas, including electoral operations, civic and voter education, capacity-building of the electoral management bodies, financial support for the hiring of polling staff, updating of the voter register, printing of the voter list, and resource mobilization. Other MINUSMA components facilitated the deployment of equipment and personnel of the national electoral authority and provided security support. The MINUSMA Human Rights Division monitored the human rights situation during both elections.

Nigeria

On 28 March and 11 April 2015, Nigeria held its presidential, parliamentary and State House of Assembly elections. Governorship elections were held in all but seven States. The elections were held in a challenging political and security

environment, amid concerns over election-related violence. The presidential elections were keenly contested by the incumbent President and an opposition leader. Polling day was generally peaceful, with some incidents of violence. Voter turnout was estimated at 47 per cent. The opposition leader secured a sufficient number of votes to win the election in the first round. The peaceful transfer of power to an opposition party was the first such event in the period following the country's transition to civilian rule in 1999.

At the request of the Nigerian authorities, the United Nations initiated a broad range of political and technical engagement activities before and during the election in support of a credible and peaceful process. This included the good offices and facilitation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa, working in close coordination with regional and international actors, in particular the African Union and ECOWAS. It also included high-level engagement by other senior United Nations officials at United Nations Headquarters and in Nigeria. UNDP provided technical assistance to national authorities, including capacity-building of the Independent National Electoral Commission in the areas of planning and electoral operations, results management and Commission-stakeholder relations. UNDP also provided support to domestic observer groups and to the National Peace Committee. A small team from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights monitored the human rights situation as centred around national elections. The Office of the High Commissioner also assisted the National Human Rights Commission in preparing a report on pre-election violence and in designing a UNDP-funded project to support the Commission's monitoring of election-related violence.

Solomon Islands

Elections to membership in parliament were held on 19 November 2014. This was the first election following the withdrawal of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, a regional security contingent deployed in 2003 at the request of the Government. This was also the first time the United Nations provided technical assistance through a comprehensive electoral assistance project implemented by UNDP. Voting proceeded in a calm and orderly manner with a high voter turnout, reaching almost 90 per cent of registered voters. Observers and the media praised the people of Solomon Islands for turning out in high numbers and for the professionalism of the electoral commission. UNDP assistance included support for creating an accurate and updated voters list, civic education, electoral law reform and strengthening of women's participation.

Tunisia

Tunisia held national elections to membership in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People on 26 October 2014, followed by presidential elections on 23 November 2014 and a second round of voting on 21 December 2014. National and international observers praised the efforts of the Tunisian High Electoral Commission; and some called polling day a milestone in Tunisia's transition. A total of 68 of the 217 seats (over 31 per cent) were filled by women. A UNDP project provided technical assistance to national authorities responsible for managing the electoral process and supported civil society organizations with

respect to public outreach activities and women candidates. Before and after the election, UNDP continued to strengthen the institutional sustainability of the electoral authorities and their ability to conduct credible electoral events through a long-term capacity-building programme. The United Nations Democracy Fund supported the development of a knowledge base of public priorities and political attitudes through which to strengthen the ability of media and political parties to respond to citizen demands; and also helped build the capacity of local associations in three regions to facilitate an increase in citizen participation in the democratic process.

Annex II

States that received United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

Afghanistan*

Albania

Algeria

Bangladesh

Benin

Bhutan

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)

Burkina Faso

Burundi*

Central African Republic*

Chad

Comoros

Côte d'Ivoire*

Democratic Republic of the Congo*

Egypt

El Salvador

Ethiopia

Georgia

Ghana

Grenada

Guatemala

Guinea

Guinea-Bissau*

Guyana

Haiti

Honduras

Iraq*

Jordan

Kenya

* Assistance was provided under a Security Council mandate.

Kyrgyzstan

Lebanon

Lesotho

Liberia*

Libya*

Madagascar

Malawi

Maldives

Mali*

Mozambique

Myanmar

Nepal

Niger

Nigeria

Pakistan

Papua New Guinea

Paraguay

Peru

Republic of Moldova

Rwanda

Samoa

Sao Tome and Principe

Senegal

Sierra Leone

Solomon Islands

Somalia*

Suriname

Timor-Leste

Togo

Tonga

Tunisia

Turkmenistan

Uganda

United Republic of Tanzania

Vanuatu

Yemen

Zambia

State of Palestine